

What is claimed is:

1. A method of metering digital content having a message to be presented to a plurality of users of a communications network, said method comprising the steps of:
  - embedding a code in said message;
  - detecting the embedded code; and
  - based on the detected embedded code, counting the number of times the message is presented to one of the users of the communications network.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the communications network includes the Internet.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the message is presented in an image format to be implemented as a stream of image data contained in a network data stream and the code is embedded in the image data, said method further comprising the step of monitoring the network data stream in order to detect the embedded code.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the code is embedded in a steganographic fashion.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the digital content is presented by a server, and wherein the embedded code contains a client identity so as to allow the server to identify the client who should pay for the digital content.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the embedded code contains a rate code for calculating a charge to a client for presenting the message in the digital content, said method further comprising the step of calculating the charge based on the counted number of times and the rate code.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the rate code includes a fixed rate.
8. The method of claim 6, wherein the rate code includes a variable rate based on the time and/or date of presenting the message to the users.
9. The method of claim 6, wherein the message is presented as an image on a display screen, and the image has a size relative to the display screen, and wherein the rate code contains a charge rate based on the image size.
10. The method of claim 6, wherein the communications network includes a plurality of destination domains, and wherein the rate code contains a charge rate based on the destination domain.
11. The method of claim 1, wherein the digital content is indicative of an advertisement.
12. A device for metering digital content having a message in the form of a data stream to be presented to a user of a communications network, wherein the message is embedded with a code for indicating that the message is actually presented to the user, said device comprising:
  - means for detecting the embedded code; and
  - means for counting the number of times the message is actually presented to the user based on the detected embedded code.
13. The device of claim 12, further comprising:
  - means for calculating a charge to a client for presenting the message to the user based on the counted number of times.
14. The device of claim 13, further comprising:
  - means for identifying the client based on the detected embedded code in order to debit the client a monetary amount representative of the charge.

15. The device of claim 12, wherein the digital content is indicative of an advertisement.

16. The device of claim 12, wherein the communications network includes the Internet and the message is incorporated in a network data stream of the Internet to be presented by a host web service, and wherein the detecting means is operatively connected to the host web service to monitor the network data so as to allow the detecting means to detect the embedded code.

17. An digital content metering system to be implemented on a communications network having network data in order to count the number of times a message included in the digital content is presented to a user of the communications network, wherein the message is contained in the network data in the form of a data stream embedded with a code, and the data stream is conveyed to the network by a conveying means, said system comprising:

means, operatively connected to the conveying means, for monitoring the data stream in order to detect the embedded code; and

means, operatively connected to the monitoring means, for counting number of presentations based on the detected embedded code.

18. The metering system of claim 17, wherein the digital content is indicative of an advertisement.

19. The metering system of claim 17, further comprising a challenge-response mechanism, connected to the network independently of the web server, for causing the counting means to pause when the monitoring means is operatively disconnected from the conveying means.

20. The system of claim 17, further comprising a mechanism, remote from

the monitoring means, for sending an authentication message to the monitoring means on a fixed time basis, and wherein the monitoring means is adapted to disable the counting means when the monitoring means does not receive the authentication message on the fixed time basis.

21. The system of claim 18, further comprising a mechanism for metering a click-through process, wherein the user clicks on the message to learn more about the advertisement.

22. An algorithm for metering digital content having a message contained in a network data stream in order to present the message to a user of a communications network, wherein the message is embedded with a code so as to allow the number of times the message is presented to the user to be counted, said algorithm including the steps of:

monitoring the network data stream in order to detect data representative of the embedded code;

recording the amount of detected data indicative of the actual presentation of the message to the user; and

calculating a charge for presenting the message according to the amount of detected data.

23. The algorithm of claim 22, wherein the digital content is indicative of an advertisement and the charge for presenting the message includes an advertisement charge.

24. The algorithm of claim 23, further comprising the step of:  
determining a rate for charging a client based on the embedded code so as to calculate the advertisement charge.

25. The algorithm of claim 23, further comprising the step of:  
debiting a client a monetary amount based on the calculated

[illegible]